

State Criminal Alien Assistance Program Funding

Written by Mike Honda

Saturday, 13 February 2010 13:15

From my position on the Appropriations Committee, I have worked to make sure that issues important and sometimes unique to California are properly funded. One such issue is the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP).

SCAAP reimburses states for the costs of incarcerating undocumented criminal aliens. Under the law that created SCAAP, the federal government is required to take all criminal aliens into federal custody. When that is not possible, which has been the case since the program was created, the law calls for the federal government to compensate state and local governments for their incarceration costs. The cost to border states such as California is disproportionately high.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has determined that states spend more than \$1.7 billion each year to incarcerate criminal aliens, but the Federal government has only reimbursed about 20 percent of these local expenditures over the years. In fact, for the last several years, presidential budget requests have included no funding for SCAAP, seeking to end the program, and only through the efforts of Congress has it receive any funding. Last year, I fought to have SCAAP funding included in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget, and \$330 million was included in the omnibus appropriations bill sent to the President.

While SCAAP funding continues to fall far short of what states and local governments actually spend to incarcerate undocumented criminal aliens, it does defray some of the costs. Without any funding, the burden would result in cuts to many local law enforcement agencies including sheriffs, police officers, anti-gang violence units, and district attorney offices, as well as a range of other services provided by counties and cities that must bear the cost of incarceration. This is why I am pleased that President Obama has changed course from previous budgets and included \$330 million for SCAAP in FY2011 budget proposal. This inclusion is an important step

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towards the federal government keeping its promise to the states.

Rest assured, I will continue to fight for increased funding for the program and ensure that California is properly appropriated what it deserves.